

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 3451

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PDEV NI
SUBJECT: CA TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT

REF: (A) LAGOS A-20, (B) LAGOS 730

BEGIN SUMMARY: CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY MEMBERS HAVE CONDEMNED A
LOCAL PRESS ARTICLE WHICH CLAIMED THAT CHIEF AWOLOWO'S SUPPORTERS
ARE AN ORGANIZED GROUP WITH DECISIVE POWER IN THE CA. END SUMMARY.

1. CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY MEMBERS (MCA'S) HAVE REACTED VEHEMENTLY
TO A LOCAL PRESS ARTICLE WHICH DESCRIBES CHIEF AWOLOWO'S DEVELOP-
ING POLITICAL STRATEGY AND ORGANIZATION AND CLAIMS THAT AWOLOWO'S
"GROUP" IN THE CA IS IN THE POSITION TO CONTROL KEY DECISIONS SUCH
AS THE SHARIA COURT ISSUE. CA REACT ON SWIFTLY FOLLOWED PUBLICA-
TION OF NDUKA ONUM'S ARTICLE "WHAT IS AWO UP TO?" IN MARCH 13
PUNCH.

2. ONUM'S ARTICLE BEGINS CRYPTICALLY THAT "THIS COLUMN HAS BEEN
OUT IN THE COLD FOR SOME TIME" AND GOES ON TO DESCRIBE WHAT IT
SAYS IS THE POLITICAL STRATEGY OF CHIEF AWOLOWO HEADING FOR 1979.
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3. ACCORDING TO ONUM, " CHIEF AWOLOWO IS AT THE MOMENT THE MOST
PROMISING STAR FOR THE POST-MILITARY PRESIDENTIAL SEAT." TO REACH
THAT GOAL, AWOLOWO "HAS UTILIZED THE PERIOD OF QUIET TO PREPARE
THE GROUNDWORK OF HIS FUTURE PARTICIPATION IN PARTISAN POLITICS."

4. ONUM WRITES THAT AWOLOWO INITIALLY EXPERIMENTED WITH A "SOUTHERN

SOLIDARITY" STRATEGY "SUPPORTED BY PERIPHERAL NORTHERN ESTABLISHMENTS

."

HOWEVER, IT SOON BECAME CLEAR TO HIM THAT THE IBO HEARTLAND OF IMO AND ANAMBRA STATES PREFERRED A NORTHERN/EASTERN ALLIANCE. AWOLOWO THEN MOVED TO A STRATEGY OF CULTIVATING SUPPORT AMONG YOUNGER MIDDLE BELT POLITICIANS WHO FEARED A RETURN OF NORTHERN DOMINATION AND IN THE ETHNIC MINORITY AREAS OF THE EAST, CROSS RIVER AND RIVERS STATE. (FYI: IT SHOULD BE RECALLED THAT THIS LATTER STRATEGY FOLLOWS THE PATTERN USED BY THE OLD AWOLOWO ACTION GROUP (AG) TO BREAK OUT OF ITS YORUBA HEARTLAND BY CONCLUDING AN ALLIANCE WITH JOSEPH TARKA'S UNITED MIDDLE BELT CONGRESS (UMBC) IN 1955. AG ALSO CULTIVATED SUPPORT AMONG ANTI-IBO EASTER MINORITIES AFTER NNAMDI AZIKIWE WENT INTO ALLIANCE WITH THE NORTH. END FYI).

5. ONUM SPECULATES THAT A WESTERN/MIDDLE BELT ALLIANCE ALONE COULD PUT ELEVEN STATES -- OGUN, ONDO, CXO AND LAGOS PLUS BENUE, PLATEAU, NIGER, GONGOLA, BAUCHI, KWARA AND EVEN KADUNA -- INTO AWOLOWO'S CAMP IN A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. FAILING THAT OPTIMAL GOAL, AWOLOWO WOULD STILL HAVE A STRONG BARGAINING OR RUN-OFF POSITION.

6. THE ARTICLE ADDS THAT AWOLOWO'S "GROUP" HAS ALREADY "STARTED EXPERIMENTAL FLEXING OF THE MUSCLES." IN PARTICULAR, ONUM SAYS "THE DECISION BY THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY TO DEBAR THE GRAND KHADIR FROM SWEARING IN THE PRESIDENT IS ONE OF SUCH CHILDHOOD GROPINGS." ONUM SAYS THAT THE NEXT TRIAL FOR AWOLOWO'S CA SUPPORTERS WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL

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SHARIA, AND HE PREDICTS "THE GROUP WILL WIN BY REMOVING THE FEDERAL SHARIA COURT OF APPEAL AS PROVIDED IN THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION."

7. ONUM CONCLUDES BY SAYING A MEETING OF THE CHIEF'S SUPPORTERS FROM ALL NINETEEN STATES TOOK PLACE AT AWOLOWO'S APAPA RESIDENCE ON FEBRUARY 26. THE GATHERING INCLUDED SOME CA MEMBERS AND VARIOUS COMMITTEES WERE SET UP ON ORGANIZATION AND POLICY FOR THE FUTURE POLITICAL PARTY. ANOTHER MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL ACCORDING TO ONUM.

8. ONUM'S ARTICLE UNLEASHED AN IMMEDIATE FIRESTORM OF REACTION IN THE CA. MORE THAN 100 MCA'S SIGNED A STATEMENT BLASTING THE ARTICLE AS A "BLATANT FABRICATION, RECKLESS, AND UNFORTUNATE." THE STATEMENT CONTINUED, "WE WISH TO REITERATE THAT WE DO NOT BELONG TO, NEITHER DO WE OWE ANY ALLEGIANCE TO, THE GROUP (IF SUCH A GROUP EXISTS IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY)." THE STATEMENT SIGNERS PARTICULARLY OBJECTED TO THE IDEA IN THE ARTICLE THAT THEY WERE SOMEHOW BEING CONTROLLED OR DIRECTED. MCA'S FROM ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY SIGNED THE STATEMENT, HOWEVER, YORUBA AND MIDDLE BELT MEMBERS WERE PARTICULARLY EVIDENT AMONG THE NAMES.

9. CHIEF AWOLOWO HANDED THE SITUATION DEFTLY BY PRAISING THE

MCA'S FOR THEIR REACTION TO THE ARTICLE, "GOOD, THAT'S THE CORRECT
THING TO DO." HE ADDED THAT HE HAD NOT FORMED ANY GROUP IN THE CA
BUT HE DID HAVE "MANY FRIENDS THERE."

10. FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE BEING POUCHED TO DEPARTMENT.

BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL.

11. COMMENT: WE FEEL THAT ONUM'S ARTICLE IS SUBSTANTIALLY CORRECT,
CERTAINLY AS IT CONCERNS AWOLOWO'S STRATEGY ON ORGANIZATION. THE
ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE ARTICLE AGREE PRECISELY WITH THE
INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REFTEL A. WE ARE NOT SURE, HOWEVER, ABOUT
THE ACCURACY OF THOSE ASPECTS OF THE ARTICLE DISCUSSING THE PNSITION
OF THE AWOLOWO "GROUP" IN THE CA. NEVERTHELESS, IT WOULD SEEM THAT
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THE MCA'S DOTH PROTEST TO MUCH. END COMMENT. END CONFIDENTIAL.

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